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FLAUBERT'S UN COEUR SIMPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Flaubert published three short stories in a volume called *Contes*. The following is a discussion of *Un Coeur Simple* which appears first in the volume although it was written last.

L'Histoire d'un cœur simple est tout bonnement le récit d'une vie obscure, celle d'une pauvre fille de campagne, dévote mais mystique, dévouée sans exaltation et tendre comme du pain frais. Elle aime successivement un homme, les enfants de sa maîtresse, un neveu, un vieillard qu'elle soigne, puis son perroquet; quand le perroquet est mort, elle le fait empailler et, en mourant à son tour, elle confond le perroquet avec le Saint-Esprit. Cela n'est nullement ironique comme vous le supposez, mais au contraire très sérieux et très triste. Je veux apitoyer, faire pleurer les âmes sensibles, en étant une moi-même.

My thoughts and information is these parts:

1. The background of the story including the historical origin of the characters and Flaubert's state of depression and frustration with his work which led him to write these stories as a "livre de repos."

2. An analysis of the text with descriptions and examples of the techniques and characteristics which have attracted attention to the story and caused it to be considered a "great" work.

3. The reactions and opinions of Flaubert's contemporaries and of succeeding generations.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1877 Flaubert published three short stories in a volume called Trois Contes. The following is a discussion of Un Coeur simple which appears first in the volume although it was written second. It has been admired for almost one hundred years as an example of good writing. Both contemporary writers and those of succeeding generations have referred to its artistic perfection. There are many English translations of it, one of which appears in almost every anthology of short fiction--especially those designed for classroom use.

My study has been limited primarily to the story itself. I have organized my thoughts and information in three parts:

- I. The background of the story including the historical origin of the characters and Flaubert's state of depression and frustration with his work which led him to write these stories as a "livre de repos."
- II. An analysis of the text with descriptions and examples of the techniques and characteristics which have attracted attention to the story and caused it to be considered a "great" work.
- III. The reactions and opinions of Flaubert's contemporaries and of succeeding generations.

I have refrained from detailed comparison with Flaubert's other works which are different, not only from this one, but also from each other. I felt myself unqualified to express opinions of the other works having, for the most part, studied them only briefly. Also absent are the literary and

critical terms most often associated with Flaubert's literary style, for I have chosen rather to express my thoughts in my own way.

Turgenev, the Russian admirer and friend of Flaubert, once said that if the writer would have the reader weep, he must first refrain from weeping. Turgenev used this technique in Anna Karénine which he added to his Sportsman's Sketches in 1877. It was Flaubert's favorite story by Turgenev--the story of a young girl who is injured and lives paralyzed and unconscious until she dies hearing the sound of bells "from above." Flaubert used this technique with great success in Un Coeur which he published in 1877 with La Légende de Saint Gilles, Hérédias and Hérédias in the collection called Un Coeur. Un Coeur is told from the point of view of the main character, indeed, we might say, of its only character. The other characters are seen through her eyes and are known only as they form parts of her experience. Her world is a world of suffering and she accepts her hardships with such resignation that Flaubert can easily use her point of view without having the story appear sentimental or melodramatic. She does not seem to understand or perhaps even understand the cruelty of her life. The total of Flaubert's literary output was not large. A writer who struggles over every sentence, reading aloud every word, refusing to pass on to something else until he had found the "not juste," does not produce quantities of work. For years he published nothing at all, saying that he wrote only for himself.

I

Turgenev, the Russian admirer and friend of Flaubert, once stated that if the writer would have the reader weep, he must himself refrain from weeping. Turgenev used this technique in The Live Relic which he added to his Sportsman's Sketches in 1874. It was Flaubert's favorite story by Turgenev--the story of a peasant girl who is injured and lives paralyzed and uncomplaining until she dies hearing the sound of bells "from above." Flaubert used this technique with great success in Un Coeur simple, which he published in 1877 with La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier and Hérodias in the collection called Trois Contes. Un Coeur simple is told from the point of view of its main character, indeed, we might say, of its only character because the other characters are seen through her eyes and are important only as they form parts of her experience. Her world is so limited and she accepts her hardships with such resignation that Flaubert can easily use her point of view without having his story appear sentimental or melodramatic. She does not question or perhaps even understand the cruelty of her life.

The total of Flaubert's literary output was not large. A writer who struggles over every sentence, reading aloud every word, refusing to pass on to something else until he had found the "mot juste," does not produce quantities of work. For years he published nothing at all, saying that he wrote only for himself.

Since the "succès de scandale" of Madame Bovary in 1857 his published works had not been well received by the public. The version of L'Education sentimentale was appreciated by a few of his friends, among them Turgenev. It was Turgenev too who wrote to friends and journalists sending them copies of La Tentation de Saint Antoine and praising it enthusiastically. Later letters show that the friends did not share Turgenev's enthusiasm and finally Turgenev was agreeing that perhaps it was not the book he had originally thought it to be. "As for the Tentation, you are unfortunately correct, and I must admit that this wonderful book is really an unreadable and barbarous work."¹ Turgenev wrote this in 1874. Flaubert's mother had died in 1872. His play Le Candidat was written and rejected by critics and the public in 1873-74. Flaubert was trying to work on Bouvard et Pécuchet for which he said he had read some 1500 books. His niece Caroline and her husband were having serious financial difficulties. Flaubert gave up everything he had to help them. At the end of the summer of 1875 he sold his property at Deauville--the house which had been the source of his income and he was obliged to ask an allowance from his niece and her husband who were not very willing to return to him a portion of what had been his in the first place.

So in September 1875 Flaubert was very unhappy. He had suffered one blow after another. In addition his health was not good, and he decided to go to Concarneau to spend as long as possible with his friend Georges Pouchet. He hoped to be refreshed by this stay at the ocean. After he had been there for one week

he wrote to Caroline that he had begun writing "quelque chose de court." This was to be La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier. He wanted to write something and finish it. On October 3 he wrote to Madame des Genettes (an English woman who had been a childhood friend of Flaubert and his sister during their vacations at Trouville): "Bouvard et Pécuchet étaient trop difficiles, j'y renonce; je cherche un autre roman sans rien découvrir. En attendant, je vais me mettre à écrire la légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier, uniquement pour l'occuper de quelque chose, pour voir si je peux encore faire une phrase, ce dont je doute... Puis, si je n'ai rien trouvé et que j'aïlle mieux, je reprendrai Bouvard et Pécuchet."² Finally he was working, but he was still depressed and unhappy.

For five months he worked on Saint Julien, the dramatization of a saint's legend which he had seen represented in a stained glass window of the Rouen cathedral. He spoke of this work with some irony, calling it "une petite bêtise'moyenâgeuse'"³ or "une petite niaiserie dont la mère pourra permettre la lecture a sa fille."⁴ But the writing of it gradually improved his spirit. He wrote to George Sand that it put him in a "milieu plus propre que le monde moderne."⁵

During the writing of Saint Julien, especially from December 1875 to February 1876 Flaubert was carrying on a correspondence with George Sand about the limitations of his own literary outlook. She wondered why he confined himself to criticism and satire; he denied having intentionally written either one or the other. As for his world view he said, "Je ne fais pas 'de la désolation'

à plaisir, mais je ne peux pas changer mes yeux."⁶ It is in this same letter that he says, "Dans l'idéal que j'ai de l'Art, je crois qu'on ne doit rien montrer des siennes (of his own convictions), et que l'artiste ne doit plus apparaître dans son oeuvre que Dieu dans la nature. L'homme n'est rien, l'oeuvre tout! Cette discipline...n'est pas facile à observer...c'est une sorte de sacrifice permanent que je fais au bon goût."⁷

In February he had almost finished Saint Julien. As he had written to Madame des Genettes, he had continued to look for another subject, another work to occupy his mind. He decided not to return to Bouvard et Pécuchet or to begin a new "roman contemporain," as he had told George Sand he might. He decided to write another short story "car je suis trop profondément ébranlé pour me mettre à une grande oeuvre."⁸ The correspondence with George Sand had caused Flaubert to think a great deal about the discipline he had imposed upon himself and the right of an author to express his ideas directly to the reader. With Saint Julien completed he began right away to work on Un Coeur simple. He was writing it to please George Sand to show her that he could be compassionate and draw out the sympathy of the reader without using sentimentality. It was, in a sense, to prove the validity of what he had written to her just before he began Un Coeur simple: "Quant à laisser voir mon opinion personnelle sur les gens que je mets en scène, non, non, mille fois non! Je ne m'en reconnais pas le droit. Si le lecteur ne tire pas d'un livre la moralité qui doit s'y trouver, c'est que le lecteur est

Un Coeur simple. "L'histoire d'un coeur simple est tout bonnement

imbécile ou que le livre est faux au point de vue de l'exactitude. Car, du moment qu'une chose est vraie, elle est bonne."⁹ In June 1876 George Sand died, never having seen the story Flaubert wrote for her.

Although the setting, the way of life, and the characters in Un Coeur simple are based on people and places well known to Flaubert, he went to great lengths to insure the accuracy of its details. He gathered documents, informed himself with painstaking thoroughness about all aspects of the story which were unfamiliar to him.

In March he wrote to Madame des Genettes, "Depuis trois jours je ne décolère pas: je ne peux mettre en train mon Histoire d'un coeur simple. J'ai travaillé hier pendant seize heures, aujourd'hui toute la journée et, ce soir enfin, j'ai terminé la première page."¹⁰ He was anxious to go to Pont-l'Évêque and to Honfleur, the scenes of the story's action but complained that the spring rains still prevented him from going. He finally made the trip and was overcome with sadness at seeing these scenes from his childhood. "Cette excursion m'a abreuvé de tristesse, car forcément j'y ai pris un bain de souvenirs. Suis-je vieux, mon Dieu! Suis-je vieux!"¹¹ In this same letter he tells Madame des Genettes of his excitement at the thought of writing a story about Hérodiade and wonders when he will ever return to "mes deux bonshommes" Bouvard et Pécuchet.

In June, after George Sand's death, an event by which he was greatly affected, Flaubert described in detail his plan for Un Coeur simple. "L'Histoire d'un coeur simple est tout bonnement

le récit d'une vie obscure, celle d'une pauvre fille de campagne, dévote mais mystique, dévouée sans exaltation et tendre comme du pain frais. Elle aime successivement un homme, les enfants de sa maîtresse, un neveu, un vieillard qu'elle soigne, puis son perroquet; quand le perroquet est mort, elle le fait empailler et, en mourant à son tour, elle confond le perroquet avec le Saint-Esprit. Cela n'est nullement ironique comme vous le supposez, mais au contraire très sérieux et très triste. Je veux apitoyer, faire pleurer les âmes sensibles, en étant une moi-même."¹² He was indeed a very sensitive and tender human being. His hatred of the bourgeoisie and of writers who cared nothing for their art sometimes seems very far removed from the character of the friend and self-sacrificing uncle he was. His correspondence reveals a gentle man whose irony is directed at a hard and insensitive bourgeois society. He did not lack compassion--as he repeatedly told George Sand.

The documentation necessary for Un Coeur simple began with his trips to Pont-l'Evêque. In July 1876 he wrote to the director of the Rouen Museum, Doctor Pannetier, who had been with Flaubert and Georges Pouchet at Concarneau. He asked to see "des perroquets et d'avoir sur eux le plus de détails possible, de connaître un peu leurs maladies et leurs moeurs."¹³ He consulted with his brother Achille and with other doctors to be sure of the exact details of the illnesses which would bring death to his characters. He had to inform himself about religious processions which he would include in the story and about the ritual of the mass which he had forgotten since the years when

he had accompanied Caroline. Most amusing and most touching was the stuffed parrot which he contemplated as he worked. To Caroline he wrote, "Actuellement j'ai donc sur ma table, autour du perroquet: le bréviaire..., ton paroissien, les quatre volumes du paroissien appartenant à ton époux; de plus l'Eucologe de Lisieux, ayant appartenu à ton arrière grand'mère."¹⁴

Not only the parrot but the characters of the story have real-life models. Actually, of course, none is modelled after a single individual and it is interesting that Flaubert combined a number of personalities to come up with a single unified personality in Félicité. The secondary characters are equally well defined in the mind of the reader even though they are described only through Félicité's limited vision.

Félicité was modelled after an old family servant of Flaubert's mother, a servant encountered during vacations at Trouville, and the servant of Flaubert's aunt. While writing Un Coeur simple Flaubert was concerned with the declining health of Julie, his mother's maid who was undergoing surgery in an attempt to prevent her approaching blindness. She was devoted to Gustave Flaubert and his sister and especially to his niece, about whose health and infrequent visits she was always concerned. Julie was a great comfort to Flaubert during the last months of his life. After dinner they remembered old times together. Both Félicité and Julie outlived their masters.

In the Notes to the Conard edition of Trois Contes it is stated that "Madame Aubain n'est autre que sa grand' tante Madame Allais, mère de deux enfants, un garçon et une fille;

Félicité en était la servante naïve et bonne, dévotement attachée à son perroquet."¹⁵ Certainly the most bizarre aspect of Félicité's personality, her attachment to her parrot, is found in the life of this servant. But Félicité is a character whom Flaubert knew intimately. He knew her type, her education, the country where she had grown up. Not only had he seen her in these three servants but, just as he claimed that he was himself Madame Bovary, so did many aspects of Félicité's life come from his own experience. His misfortune was greater because he understood it, reflected upon it. He had known the coolness and greed of his niece and her husband for whom he had sacrificed so much. At the time of the writing of Un Coeur simple he had just managed to save his beloved home at Croisset from sale to pay the debts of his niece's husband. He was attached to it as Félicité was attached to Madame Aubain's house. He wrote to Caroline of Julie and of himself, "Je comprends le mal que Julie a eu à quitter Croisset. Quand on devient vieux, les habitudes sont d'une tyrannie dont tu n'a pas l'idée, pauvre enfant. Tout ce qui s'en va, tout ce que l'on quitte a le caractère de l'irrévocable et on sent la mort marcher sur vous."¹⁶

Flaubert made this detailed outline and followed it very closely:

- I. Figure de Félicité et la maison de Mme Aubain.
- II. Son histoire, entre chez Mme Aubain--les enfants--
personnages secondaires--Geffosses--le taureau--
Trouville--Paul envoyé au college.
- III. Catéchisme de Virginie--I^{re} communion.
Départ pour le couvent.
Son neveu.
Paquebot d'Honfleur.
Inquiétudes de son sort--Le Havre.
Sa mort.
Maladie, mort de Virginie.
Veille et enterrement.
Désespoir--hypocondrie de Mme Aubain.
Monotonie de leur existence--petits faits.
Revue de ses affaires.
Arrivée du perroquet.
- IV. Descriptions, gentilleses de Loulou.
Crevé dans sa cage.
Le porte à Honfleur.
Empaillé.
Dépouillement de la maison à vendre ou à louer.¹⁷

He wrote the story two times, marking and editing, adding and correcting. The third draft was his final one and when it was published he made only a few minor corrections in the original manuscript. On August 17, 1876, he wrote to Caroline, "Hier à une heure de nuit, j'ai terminé mon Coeur simple."¹⁸

II

"Pendant un demi-siècle les bourgeoises de Pont-l'Evêque envièrent à Madame Aubain sa servante Félicité."

The manuscripts of a writer who composed as painfully as Flaubert did are fascinating especially when he is successful. The first line of Un Coeur simple is one of the best opening lines of any story ever written and when we examine the earlier forms of the line we see that Flaubert recognized the "mot juste" when he finally found it. With a dozen words Flaubert has given the time and duration of the story, the setting--a small town in Normandy, the social milieu and relationship of the two main characters, and an indication of Félicité's quality.

He goes on, in the next paragraph to elaborate on Félicité's talents, choosing the perfect combination of things which she did well, ending with "et resta fidèle à sa maîtresse,--qui cependant n'était pas une personne agréable." A good example of the "mot juste" is this "resta fidèle à sa maîtresse" which Flaubert changed from "aima sa maîtresse" in the final manuscript. It predicts the quality of "chien fidèle" which Félicité will have later in the story. And whose opinion is Flaubert expressing in this judgment of Madame Aubain's character? He would deny that it was his own--although he would certainly agree with it. We will see that it is not Félicité's because although she is occasionally hurt by Madame Aubain's selfish coldness, she does not dwell on it and forgives her everything. But Flaubert's opening line has provided him a point of view on which to hang his judgment without expressing his own opinion--"les bourgeoises de Pont-l'Evêque" who envied Felicite's hard work for one hundred

francs a year and wondered why she stayed with the disagreeable widow Aubain.

With only a few exceptions Flaubert will remain true to the point of view he has chosen for the story. He will include no events which are outside the realm of Félicité's experience--no easy task because her intelligence was so limited, but this is the beauty and the success of the story: by relating the story from her point of view Flaubert need not weep but the reader surely will. Occasionally Flaubert allows himself a comment--he can rarely pass up an opportunity to stab at the bourgeoisie. The question of point of view in Un Coeur simple can be illustrated well by an examination of the character of Bourais. We first see him through Félicité's eyes--in a series of portraits of the secondary characters to whom we are introduced as Felicite opens--or closes--the door to them. "Elle l'ouvrait avec plaisir devant M. Bourais, ancien avoué. Sa cravate blanche et sa calvitie, le jabot de sa chemise, son ample redingote brune, sa façon de priser en arrondissant le bras, tout son individu lui produisait ce trouble où nous jette le spectacle des hommes extraordinaires." We recognize his absurdity, but understand how Félicité can be fooled by his airs.

Bourais showed his "superiority" when Félicité asked him to show her, on his map, where her nephew Victor was living--expecting to see on the map, not a group of meaningless lines, but the house where he lived. "Bourais leva le bras, il éternua, rit énormément; une candeur pareille excitait sa joie; et Félicité n'en comprenait pas le motif,--elle qui s'attendait peut-être à

voir jusqu'au portrait de son neveu, tant son intelligence était bornée!" Bourais laughs heartily at Félicité, but Flaubert doesn't let him get away with it. He gets his punishment for bourgeois superiority from Félicité's parrot Loulou. "La figure de Bourais, sans doute, lui paraissait très drôle. Dès qu'il l'apercevait, il commençait à rire, à rire de toutes ses forces. Les éclats de sa voix bondissaient dans la cour, l'écho les répétait, les voisins se mettaient à leurs fenêtres, riaient aussi; et, pour ne pas être vu du perroquet, M. Bourais se coulait le long du mur, en dissimulant son profil avec son chapeau, atteignait la rivière, puis entraît par la porte du jardin; et les regards qu'il envoyait à l'oiseau manquaient de tendresse." Occasionally Flaubert makes a comment of his own without the support of "les bourgeoises de Pont-l'Evêque" or Loulou. For instance, when Félicité finally receives her stuffed parrot: "Enfin il arriva, et splendide, droit sur une branche d'arbre, qui se vissait dans un socle d'acajou, une patte en l'air, la tête oblique et mordant une noix que l'empailleur par amour du grandiose avait dorée."

These jabs of Flaubert's irony exist. Some critics have said, however, that Flaubert's attitude toward Félicité herself is ironic and that Loulou is symbolic of the "parrot fever" of human beings.¹ Considering the state of mind in which Flaubert was living during the months of the writing of Un Coeur simple and the letter which he wrote to Madame des Genettes to describe his intention, it seems more likely that his attitude toward

Félicité was one of compassion and his irony is reserved for the bourgeoisie. This is not a case of depending on the writer instead of the story, for close analysis shows this to be true. In his biography of Flaubert, Philip Spencer says, "It is as though Flaubert, after his personal trials, had transcended the harsh conception of Bouvard et Pécuchet and granted that a humble life of sacrifice and duty, however innocent of critical intelligence, possessed an intrinsic beauty and therefore an intrinsic meaning."²

Flaubert always put the form--the artistic beauty of a story--before its content. While writing *Madame Bovary* he had said that he hoped to prove that there are no poetic subjects--that the beauty was determined by the writer's style, by his art. In Countries of the Mind, J. M. Murry accuses Flaubert of being deficient in "creative imagination and the sensibility from which imagination is replenished."³ It was then, in Murry's opinion, not because he was an outstanding artist but because he was not that he worked so hard and long on each phrase. Murry accuses Flaubert of trying to replace sensitivity and imagination with reference books.⁴ This explains his opinion that only Madame Bovary and Un Coeur simple are great works. They came from Flaubert's experience and not from his "reference books." He says that L'Education Sentimentale is "life, but it is not living; it is a work of history rather than of literature."⁵

The conflict of inspiration and technique, of the romantic and the realist, appears again and again in Flaubert. His favorite writers were those who wrote easily and beautifully--the way he

wrote his letters. Gide might be said to dispute the idea that Flaubert's deficiency was imagination when he stated that he preferred his correspondence to any of his work written for publication. It is true that the spontaneity and warmth of the letters make them appealing and draw the reader to Flaubert as none of his carefully written books do. His best works are outstanding examples of artistic excellence but in the others, the style, however good, does not make up for inspiration. In Un Coeur simple form and content, inspiration and documentation are admirably combined.

Having chosen to limit himself to Félicité's point of view, Flaubert uses short, direct sentences. The harshness of the reality and the absence of qualifying circumstances are thus emphasized. This form too makes the story seem to move faster--very important in a story with no real plot. Félicité would have perceived and related the events of her life in these short simple phrases. This is Flaubert's way of moving the reader by refraining from tears. It is the reader and not Flaubert or Félicité who reacts with horror when Félicité, left behind to light a candle in the church for the dying Virginie, runs for an hour to catch the carriage which would take her to the beloved child--only to jump down and run home again when she remembers having left the gate unlocked.

The vocabulary of the story presents another case of the combination of form and content. For the most part it is a very simple vocabulary to match the syntax and Félicité's intelligence. But there is also an abundance of obsolete of

archaic words. Part of the explanation for this certainly lies in the necessity of combining words which produced the most effective rhythm. There is also the fact that the characters themselves require this vocabulary--names for familiar articles remain unchanged in the provinces of France years after they have become obsolete elsewhere.

Flaubert does, on occasion, sacrifice clarity of content in order to achieve a certain rhythm. This sacrifice is not always worthwhile because the ambiguity which it causes stops the movement of the story while the reader looks back for the antecedent of a pronoun or the definition of an obsolete term. The best example is in the third paragraph of the first part of the story, "Elle avait épousé un beau garçon sans fortune, mort au commencement de 1809, en lui laissant deux enfants très jeunes avec une quantité de dettes." We have only two characters to choose from--Madame Aubain or Félicité--and this first sentence could apply to either of them. The next sentence will clarify it, if the reader has not already stopped to try to figure out what he had overlooked. Another example is in the account of Félicité's encounters with Théodore. "Théodore, la semaine suivante, en obtint des rendez-vous." This "en" refers, of course, to Félicité, but Flaubert would not permit himself to write "d'elle des rendez-vous" or "des rendez-vous d'elle." This sacrifice to sound is described by Philip Spencer; "Grammar he acknowledged and respected: it was a necessary convention. But he declared that no grammarian had ever been able to write, and when academic correctness involved ugliness

of sound, he rode rough-shod over the rules."⁶ The simplicity of the vocabulary can be further noted by the near absence of images or similes. The few which Flaubert includes are not always taken from Félicité's thought. At the death of Madame Aubain, for instance, "Félicité la pleura comme on ne pleure pas les maîtres." This is surely not Félicité's observation. It is an attitude which would best be attributed to "les bourgeois de Pont-l'Evêque."

And again, after the death of Victor, Félicité goes automatically to the river to finish her laundry. "Les prairies étaient vides, le vent agitait la rivière; au fond, de grandes herbes s'y penchaient, comme des chevelures de cadavres flottant dans l'eau." Death filled Félicité's mind, and it is possible that she did think that the grass in the water resembled the hair of cadavers. It seems unlikely however that she would have made this comparison herself. Perhaps it is Flaubert's preparation for the series of illness and death which is to follow.

Flaubert's childhood at his father's hospital gave him some preparation for these details of his story. He also consulted with his brother Achille who provided him with much information but with whom Flaubert had little in common. He was always anxious to leave after a short stay with him in Rouen. The preparatory notes are full of symptoms, cures, and medical terms concerning pneumonia and pleuresy. That he so carefully described the appearance of the dead Virginie is not surprising: first, because Félicité would have noticed all the changes which had taken place in the dear face and, second, because one

of Flaubert's first memories from his childhood was the sight of the cadavers which he and his brother and sister saw in a room in the hospital. As for the pneumonia of which Madame Aubain died at the age of seventy-two, Flaubert kept a medical book about pneumonia on his desk with the parrot and the prayerbooks.

Whether Félicité actually died of pneumonia is not stated definitely by Flaubert. It is possible that a physician could determine that on the basis of Flaubert's description. His documentation was that accurate. It was actually the subject of medical thesis at the University of Paris.⁷ What we do know is that Félicité believed that to be her illness and was very happy to die "comme Madame."

He was not even uninformed about the possible illness of the parrot. His description of the tumor which Félicité tore from under Loulou's tongue is probably as realistic and more unpleasant than any of the human illnesses.

Flaubert was very much pre-occupied with death during that time. He was thinking not only of death of his mother and of George Sand of whose funeral he had said, "Il m'a semblé que j'enterrais ma mère une seconde fois,"⁸ but also of the death of Louise Colet his former mistress, of Ernest Lemarié whom he had known in school at Rouen. Illness, too, was in the front of his mind--his own ill health, the delicate health of Caroline, and the old age and illness of Mademoiselle Julie."

Flaubert's scope is limited now. The eyes through which he has up to now showed the action and characters of the story have grown blind. The entire narrative must now be drawn into Félicité's room. We see part of the procession through Félicité's

imagination. "Elle la voyait, comme si elle l'eût suivie." In order to see the altar on which her treasured Loulou^{stands} with a broken wing and the stuffing falling out, Flaubert uses another observer, the woman who has been helping to care for Félicité in her illness. She had to climb up on a chair to see the altar which Flaubert describes in detail. As the vapor of incense rises to Félicité's room, she dies thinking that she sees "dans les cieux entr'ouverts, un perroquet gigantesque, planant au-dessus de sa tête." Those who believe that Flaubert is laughing at Félicité's ignorance and credulity consider this scene something of a last bad joke on Félicité and make much of the "crut voir." But, for Félicité, "crut voir" is as good as "vit" and her death is, for her, peaceful and happy.

One of the outstanding characteristics of his talent is Flaubert's ability to choose just the right details to include in a description. The approach to the chateau in Madame Bovary is surely the most often discussed example. In Mimesis Erich Auerbach analyses another text from Madame Bovary. It is the description of Emma's misery which became unbearable at mealtime. The misery which she feels is summed up by a series of sense perceptions which, not Emma but Flaubert organizes, "le poêle qui fumait, la porte qui criait, les murs qui suintaient, les pavés humides..." A similar series of sense perceptions sums up the total impression which the fair makes on Félicité. "Tout de suite elle fut étourdie, stupéfaite par

le tapage des ménétriers, les lumières dans les arbres, la bigarrure des costumes, les dentelles, les croix d'or, cette masse de monde sautant à la fois." Flaubert manages, by this selection of detail, to create the scene for us. Félicité, overcome by the whole of it could never have separated the impressions from each other. "Elle se tenait à l'écart modestement" both physically and emotionally.

The telescopic technique which Flaubert had used in the scene of the approach to the château in Madame Bovary reappears. Félicité, walking along a familiar road, encounters the boy again. "Un autre soir, sur la route de Beaumont, elle voulut dépasser un grand chariot de foin qui avançait lentement, et en frôlant les roues elle reconnut Théodore." The beginning of the sentence, the slowly moving hay cart, leaves us as unprepared as Félicité for the shock of recognizing Théodore. Red letters would not have shown Félicité's reaction any better. Before this Flaubert had not even mentioned Théodore's name. Then in three words "elle reconnut Théodore" he tells us not only that she knew it but also indicates that she had been thinking about it.

Many of the techniques and characteristics which made Madame Bovary great are found in this short story, written--however painfully--in less than six months. Un Coeur simple remains an excellent example of artistic perfection in the short story.

brother were less than amusing pastimes for him. Leconte de Lisle, author of *Le Châli* and close friend of Flaubert, was depressed by the story, finding that the life of the provinces had indeed led her too much of the dull life she was leading in the provinces.² Leconte de Lisle was

The Trois Contes met with immediate popular success when it was published in 1877. Turgenev had been working on translations for the Russian public. He had translated Saint Julien himself, and had arranged for the translation of Un Coeur simple. The stories were to have appeared in Russia before they were published in France, but the work was delayed by Turgenev's gout, his laziness, and his trips with Pauline Viardot. He was very enthusiastic about the stories, especially Un Coeur simple, which he admired very much. Perhaps he recognized an influence of his own story The Live Relic in Félicité's patient suffering and in the circumstances of her death. Turgenev's paralyzed serf girl heard bells "from above" and Félicité saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a parrot. In spite of the long periods without letters from Turgenev, Flaubert loved him and respected his literary opinion. He was very pleased by Turgenev's enthusiasm.

Other friends reacted with great joy to the publication of these stories even though George Sand herself never got to read Flaubert's "proof" that his heart was not hard. Even Achille, Flaubert's very bourgeois brother who had been consulted for medical facts, sent a rather strange complimentary letter. "Je ne crois pas que tu aies jamais rien écrit de mieux, et je sais que tu écris d'habitude assez proprement."¹ One understands how Flaubert's material-gathering visits with his

brother were less than amusing pastimes for him. Laure de Maupassant, mother of Guy de Maupassant and close friend of Flaubert, was depressed by the story, finding that the life of Felicite and Madame Aubain reminded her too much of the dull life she was leading in the provinces.² Leconte de Lisle was enthusiastic and accurate in describing the real masterpiece of Trois Contes. "Tom premier conte, Un Coeur simple, est une merveille de netteté, d'observation infaillible et de certitude d'expression."³

Auguste Sabatier, theologian from the University of Strasbourg who had married a friend of Caroline, wrote: "Le Coeur simple/sic/ m'a paru une étude psychologique magistrale."⁴ Flaubert had read it to him the summer before its publication, just as he was finishing it. He described Sabatier's reaction to Caroline: "Il a donc ouï l'Histoire d'un Coeur simple et m'en a paru si ému, avoir se bien compris mes intentions, enfin tellement admiratif que j'ai entamé Saint Julien!"⁵

Among the other congratulatory letters is this one from Edmond de Goncourt:

30 avril (1877)

Cher Vieux,

Va pour vendredi!

Je n'ai encore lu que le Coeur simple/sic/mais je le trouve, selon l'expression du maître, tout à fait, tout à fait chef-d'oeuvreux."

Tout au pur, au vertueux, à l'honnête auteur des Trois Contes.

Edmond de Goncourt

Si vous aviez le déshonneur d'être couronné de force par l'Académie!!!!!!⁶

One wonders what reaction Edmond de Goncourt must have had to the other stories: the Saint's life from a legend of the middle ages and the colorful Hérodiade, the story of the execution of Saint John the Baptist. On May 30, 1877, Flaubert wrote to Madame des Genettes, "Un monsieur, dans l'Union, trouve que Félicité c'est 'Germinie Lacerteux au pays du cidre!' Ingénieux rapprochement."⁷ Flaubert's sarcasm is easy to understand in light of the obvious differences in intent and realization of the story of his servant girl and that of the Goncourts. In their preface to Germinie Lacerteux the Goncourts had criticized the limitation of literary subject matter to the upper classes. Madame Bovary had not been published at the time when they were writing their preface. Their reason for choosing to write the sad story of the adventures of a maid is described by Erich Auerbach in Mimesis as "the sensory fascination of the ugly, the repulsive, and the morbid."⁸ Flaubert tells the truth about Félicité's sad life, but even in the somewhat morbid details of her illness and death he maintains a certain dignity. Flaubert was an artist and the Goncourts were historians, collectors of details of human misery. In a letter to George Sand Flaubert made the following comparison of their goals in writing, "Goncourt est très heureux quand il a saisi dans la rue un mot qu' il peut coller dans un livre, et moi très satisfait quand j'ai écrit une page sans assonances ni répétitions."⁹

...are willing to devote themselves to the tedious
occupations of "art" as Flaubert was. He was loved by

The reaction of the press was generally favorable. There was already disagreement as to Flaubert's attitude--ironic or compassionate--toward Felicite. The critic Drumont in La Liberté was especially moved by the story and admired Flaubert's ability to paint characters. In La Patrie G. de Saint-Valry says that the Trois Contes contain all of Flaubert's writing in short form. Un Coeur simple was, he said, "un résumé de l'art qui a produit Madame Bovary and L'Education sentimentale." He asked, "Sont-ils persuadés que la platitude, la vulgarité, la laideur sont les seules expressions de la réalité?" Yet he found Un Coeur simple "un chef-d'oeuvre de vie, d'émotion, et j'ajoute d'élevation morale."¹⁰ Saint-Valry, who had also spent his childhood in Normandy, experienced a tender and sentimental return to the villages where life went on at the same pace--as indeed it still does--with hardly any notice of the revolutionary changes in government, in social order, in anything outside the village--even outside the house.

A more difficult test of greatness is the continuing interest inspired by a work and perhaps, in a different way, the imitation of it. J. M. Murry considers that Flaubert's writing methods are to be copied by second-class writers like Flaubert himself, by those who wish to compensate for lack of inspiration with work.¹¹ Few artists whose lack is inspiration, however, are willing to devote themselves to the tedious occupations of "Art" as Flaubert was. He was loved by

contemporary artists and they despaired when he continued to try to force himself to write about the far-away and exotic when his genius was clearly in writing about things which he knew. The clear superiority of Un Coeur simple, Madame Bovary, and L'Education sentimentale indicates that their advice was good.

In the last of his essays on Flaubert in The Gates of Horn, Spleen and Ideal, Harry Levin says, "Un Coeur simple, at all events has won the widest acceptance as a model of technique for shorter fiction. Ezra Pound testified for his generation, when he averred that it 'contains all that anyone needs to know about writing.' Three Lives, the most convincing of Gertrude Stein's efforts to let the inarticulate speak for itself, was roughly modelled on Trois Contes."12

Gertrude Stein had been in Paris with her brother for only a short time when she began "as an exercise" to translate Flaubert's Trois Contes. In the middle of this project she decided that she wanted to write again and she began working on Three Lives, the stories of three servant girls, one Negro and two German. The first story, The Good Anna, shows great similarity of "plot" to the story of Felicite. Anna cares for a mistress who does nothing for herself. Gertrude Stein made Anna a stronger, more self-determined character than Félicité, but we have seen that, in buying and selling, for instance, Felicite could be strong too. The form of the story is based on Un Coeur simple: first, a description of Anna in the home

of Miss Mathilda, then a brief return to the past to tell what Anna's life had been before she came to Miss Mathilda, and finally a chronological order ending with Anna's death. There is as little plot development in one as in the other. At the end of the stories we find that nothing has "happened," except that two servants have lived and died. A few of the specific similarities are noted by Donald Sutherland in his biography of Gertrude Stein's works.¹³ Compare the opening line of Un Coeur simple with that of The Good Anna:

"Pendant un demi-siècle les bourgeoises de Pont-l'Evêque envièrent à Mme Aubain sa servante Félicité."

"The tradesmen of Bridgepoint learned to dread the sound of 'Miss Mathilda' for with that name the good Anna always conquered."

Later in the stories:

"Elle avait eu comme une autre son histoire d'amour."

"The widow Mrs. Lehntman was the romance in Anna's life."

Each story is told from the servant's point of view. Apparently the Miss Mathilda who is Anna's favorite mistress is modelled on Gertrude Stein herself, but little of her world is shown. Anna encourages her to go out and to enjoy herself just as Félicité prepares "les cartes et les chaufferettes" for the weekly games of "boston." Although Anna "had no strong natural feeling to love children" as Félicité seems to have had, she still cared for them, and she loved animals and found it impossible not to give help to anyone who needed it. "So the

good Anna gave her all to friends and strangers, to children, dogs and cats, to anything that asked or seemed to need her care." As Felicite helped the Polish soldiers, Anna took in boarders and could not bear to raise the rent. Both grew very sick at the end of their lives and their strong bodies--both had seemed "femmes en bois"--died--Félicité having visions of her parrot and the good Anna sending her love to Miss Mathilda. The third story in Three Lives also contains elements from Un Coeur simple. The personality of The Gentle Lena is to be compared with that of Félicité. She too is deserted at the last minute by the man she is about to marry. Unfortunately, he is brought back, however, and instead of having to work hard to take care of herself and maintain her pride, she becomes as careless and unattractive wife.

Of course it is not similarity of plot which indicates literary influence, and Gertrude Stein's style was influenced less by Flaubert than by others. She cared little for French literature and was translating Trois Contes only because her brother Leo was reading it. She read French mostly in translation--except for Zola. "French was the speaking language and English the writing one."¹⁴ She certainly used simple language in order to maintain her character's point of view, but the rhythm is determined not by the beauty it has when read aloud, but by the "rhythm of the personality," a theory with which she had experimented as a student of psychology.¹⁵

We have already noted the affectionate as well as literary relationship between Flaubert and Turgenev. Un Coeur simple

reminds one of the simple, uneventful stories of Turgenev. We would also find many similarities in stories by Chekhov in the succeeding generation. In the question of the artist's perspective or attitude toward his character, we would find much for comparison in Chekhov's The Darling. It is one of his late works, written in 1899. It is also the story of a woman, this one the daughter of a middle class government worker instead of a servant. Olenka Plemmyannikova also passes from one love to another and can be happy only when she has someone on whom to pour out her love. Chekhov's attitude toward her has been as much discussed as Flaubert's attitude toward Félicité. Lev Tolstoy's opinion on this issue is often published with the story--almost as part of it. What Tolstoy really expresses in this commentary is not so much an analysis of Chekhov's attitude toward the Darling as what Tolstoy would thought of her if he had created her himself. It is Tolstoy's belief that Chekhov started writing the story, planning it to be ironic and critical of a woman who could love her father, three men, and a child in rapid succession and with equal intensity, recovering from each death to pass on to a new love. Then, in writing, he himself fell in love with her and his tone became gentle instead of ironic. His attitude is surely gentle, but perhaps Chekhov, like Flaubert, disappointed in and often critical of the world as he saw it, meant it to be so from the beginning. As they grew older they could see the beauty of a simple life which had love as its only reason for being.

CONCLUSION

The beauty of Un Coeur simple is in its simplicity, its completeness as a work of art, its tenderness. In so few pages Flaubert has indeed presented a fine argument for his writing technique. The theory of searching for just the right word has Un Coeur simple as a proof of success in practice. Within a single work it is difficult to choose a single text for analysis because each line received equal work and polishing before it could be called "finished" by Flaubert.

Flaubert's work as a whole, particularly Madame Bovary, of course, has had a great influence on Western literature. Not all writers who have followed him have been willing or even found it necessary to make the same sacrifices for "Art." It would be impossible to count the number of writers who have admired or even imitated Un Coeur simple as the model for short fiction. But if Ezra Pound believed that it "contained all anyone needed to know about writing," we may conclude that there have been many.

NOTES

1. Ivan Turgenev, Turgenev's Letters. P. 271
2. Gustave Flaubert, Correspondance. VII, p. 267
3. Corr. VII, p.279
4. Corr. VII, p. 283
5. Corr. VII, p. 279
6. Corr. VII, p. 280
7. Corr. VII, pp. 280-281
8. Corr. VII, p. 286
9. Corr. VII, p. 285
10. Corr. VII, p. 292
11. Corr. VII, p. 295
12. Corr. VII, p. 307
13. Corr. VII, p. 319
14. Corr. VII, p. 334
15. Gustave Falubert, Trois Contes. Notes de Un Coeur simple, p. 65
16. Corr. VII, p. 275
17. Trois Contes, Notes, p. 68
18. Corr. VII, p. 339

II

1. Luc Dariosecq, "A Propos de Loulou," French Review, XXXI (1958), pp. 322-324.
Ben Stoltzfus, "Point of View in Un Coeur simple," French Review, XXXV (1961), pp. 19-25.
2. Philip Spencer, Flaubert, A Biography, pp. 222-223.
3. J. M. Murry, Countries of the Mind. p. 166.
4. Murry, p. 166.
5. Murry, p. 167.
6. Spencer, p. 141.
7. Josiah Combs, Two Tales of Flaubert. Introduction, p. xix.
8. Corr. VII, p. 309.

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